

UNDER SECRETARY OF STATE FOR
ARMS CONTROL AND INTERNATIONAL SECURITY
WASHINGTON

April 7, 2015

MEMORANDUM FOR THE CHAIRMAN, INTERNATIONAL
SECURITY ADVISORY BOARD (ISAB)

SUBJECT: Terms of Reference – ISAB Study on International Security and
Foreign Policy Implications of Overseas Disease Outbreaks

The International Security Advisory Board (ISAB) is requested to undertake a study of the international security and foreign policy implications of significant overseas disease outbreaks.

A number of factors combine to make such disease outbreaks—whether natural or deliberate in origin—an increasingly salient national security and foreign policy issue: widespread and rapid international travel increases the risk that infectious diseases may spread widely; high degrees of reliance on international trade, including for food sufficiency, renders countries vulnerable to economic and other shocks in cases where disease outbreaks disrupt commerce; the rise of mega-cities in the developing world accentuates the risk of large scale infectious disease outbreaks in countries with limited public health (or even governance) capacity. Globally, few countries have yet put in place the full range of capabilities needed to effectively detect and respond to such outbreaks, despite international commitments to do so, creating vulnerabilities to both emerging diseases and, potentially, acts of bioterrorism. Especially in fragile states, or where suspicions arise about the actions of other states, a major outbreak could pose a risk of civil unrest or border conflicts, and have destabilizing global security implications – especially given that outbreaks can be naturally occurring or man-made, and identification and attribution take time. Moreover, significant disease outbreaks can have a devastating impact on health workers and other care-givers, hindering efforts to control the outbreak and undermining states' ability to deal with future health threats, and—depending on what elements of the population are most susceptible to a given outbreak—can also have disruptive or destabilizing effects on demographic patterns.

An additional consideration is the unique role of the United States. While international responses to overseas disease outbreaks rely on a mix of international and non-governmental organizations supported financially and technically by key countries, U.S. airlift and other logistics capabilities, combined with high-caliber technical expertise, enable it to play a leading role in responding to such outbreaks. However, these assets may also be required for other vital security and public health missions, requiring policymakers to weigh possible tradeoffs.

The relationship between efforts to mitigate civil unrest and border conflicts and efforts to slow and reverse overseas disease outbreaks are complex and not well understood. The United States has an interest in enhancing both efforts, while avoiding implementation measures that (1) undermine or work at cross-purposes to either goal, or (2) undermine the development and maintenance of domestic capacity in affected nations.

It would be of great assistance if the ISAB could examine and assess:

- the effect of overseas disease outbreaks on geo-political stability and international relations, including long-term impacts;
- the structure, strengths and weaknesses of existing international systems for responding to disease outbreaks;
- the implications of currently limited international capabilities to rapidly, reliably and credibly resolve questions about whether an overseas outbreak is deliberate, natural, or accidental in origin, and options to address this;
- methods for improving international and U.S. responses to overseas outbreak-caused civil unrest and border conflict without impeding disease response efforts; and
- methods for improving international and U.S. response to overseas disease outbreaks without contributing to civil unrest or border conflict or undermining the development of domestic capacity in affected nations.

Recommendations produced during the study on enhanced international collaborations for preparedness and response, following review by the Department and interagency, may inform the U.S. delegation's position at the 8th Review Conference of the Biological Weapons Convention, in December 2016. These recommendations could directly inform U.S. positions on Article VII and Article X.

I request that you complete the study in 270 days. Completed work should be submitted to the ISAB Executive Directorate no later than January 2016.

The Under Secretary of State for Arms Control and International Security will sponsor the study. The Assistant Secretary of State for International Security and Nonproliferation will support the study. Rebecca Katz will serve as the Executive Secretary for the study and Chris Herrick will represent the ISAB Executive Directorate.

The study will be conducted in accordance with the provisions of P.L. 92-463, the "Federal Advisory Committee Act." If the ISAB establishes a working group to assist in its study, the working group must present its report of findings to the full ISAB for consideration in a formal meeting, prior to presenting the report or findings to the Department.



Rose E. Gottemoeller